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March 2, 2018

School Assemblies: 13 Things Every Planner Should Know

It can be a little nerve-wracking, coordinating a school assembly performance.

Will students be bored? Will teachers feel it's a big waste of time?

Will the custodian **breath fire on you** for disrupting the flow of his/her day?

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Plan
normal range of duties for you, the teacher-/administrator-/parent-turned-arts-specialist, and all
please with your choices.

Here's What Assembly Performers Say. . .



To help you along just a little bit, here's a round
could muster from the performer's side of things.

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Consider this your guide to making everyone – – students, teachers, administrators AND performers – – exceedingly happy.



These tips are taken from both my own 20+ years experience [as an assembly performer](#) and, far more importantly, the combined 142 years of wisdom of some very talented friends and colleagues who've been doing parallel work "in the trenches."

I hope you will find something of real value here.

Please feel free to add your voice to the discussion in the comments section below.

So now, in no particular order, here they are. . .



#1. 55 kids in a 400 seat auditorium stinks (usually)

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If you'll have a small group attending a presentation (say, less than 100 bodies), ask the performers if they'd prefer to work with the students in a smaller environment.

This may be counter to what the school is accustomed to (*"Oh, there's a performance today? We do those in the cafeteria"*), but for many types of programs, some real magic can be created out of thin air simply by clearing a bit of space in the school library, or in a multipurpose room, or an LGI (large group instruction room), so students can be really "up close and personal" with the presenters.



Stuck in a large room? Musician and forty year arts-in-education veteran [Jeff Warner](#) says “k especially if you have a large group. Best to have them sit on the floor, without chairs, reducing you (the performer) better—and so that you can have better crowd control.”

PRO TIP

Many times, in the absence of an alternate space, I will bring small groups right front of me, effectively turning a large room into a small intimate one. Again, this won't work if presenters like to interact and connect with the audience, smaller is often better.

Here's what THAT looks like...

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OK, moving on . . . (and speaking of “Oh, there’s a performance today?” . . .)

2. The custodian is your friend (sometimes)

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve walked into the main office of a school and heard some v



Office to Custodian: “Stan, I have t
assemblies today. Can you come up here and help him get his things to the auditeria/cafetorium

Custodian to Office: “(long silence.....) We have an assembly today? Nobody told

Custodian to me, after leaving the office: “Nobody told me about this. I’ve got the whole sc
me anything. Grumble, grumble, grumble...”

Let the custodial staff know *ahead of time* if there’s going to be a performance that will affect

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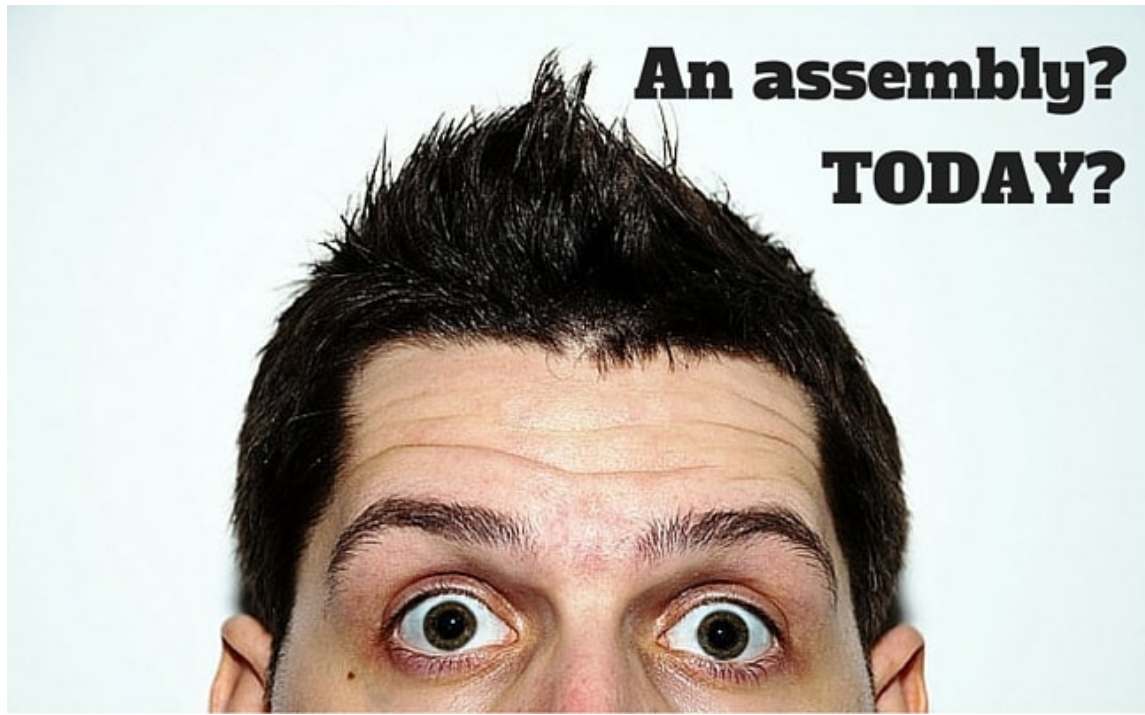
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3. Let the teachers know what you've done!

Teachers have more on their plates today than ever before, and they're [feeling really squeezed for instruction time](#). Generally speaking, they don't like to be surprised with assemblies unless you happen to be catching them in the middle of deep dark winter with no school holiday break in site (or anytime during the last two weeks of school).



You might even consider letting teachers know the topic ahead of time and allowing them to “for “specials” teachers – they get to see their students so infrequently as it is, and they may be exhibition or play of their own.

4. Teachers don't (always) like school assemblies

Related to the point above, teachers don't always welcome assemblies that don't connect to what here would be to consider offering grade-specific programming that actually ties into their curriculum.

Third graders learning about Amazonian Frogs? Bring in an expert for a special third grade assembly.

Kindergarten and First Grades focusing on Communities and Neighborhoods? There's a

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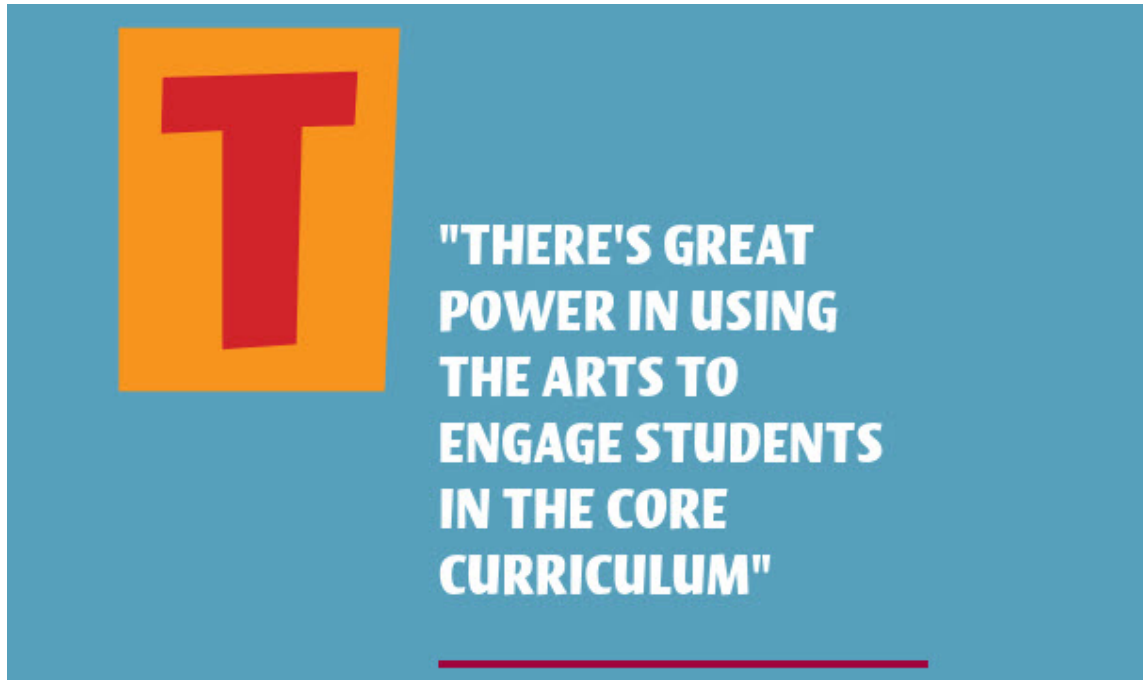
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Some of my favorite and most meaningful work in schools is when I get to be with one grade level at a time, using music to excite students in *what they're already learning* in ELA, or Social Studies!

Call it [arts integration](#), [cross-curricular teaching](#), [differentiated instruction](#) – these are all education buzzwords for a reason, and there's great power in using the arts to engage students in the core curriculum.



5. Don't let the performers treat you like you're a performer

Because you're not. Plain and simple; you are a school.

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The fact that you're making the time and space available for the presentation of an arts-based program makes you a **hero** in the eyes of many of us. School performers need to be super flexible in terms of accommodations, space, time constraints, etc, understanding that you are in the business of educating children, not producing live arts events.

6. There might be a better way to group multiple grades

For my own work, I always gently ask that schools *try* to schedule the sessions so that similar ages are grouped together.

I fully understand that things can't always work that way, and I will always make the best of the situation, whether it's dealing with a mix of K-2 students or facing a session with Grades K, 1, and 6.

But, **those big gaps in age can create a real dilemma** for some performers in terms of keeping the younger ones engaged and the older ones, and vice versa.



Judd Sunshine

Judd Sunshine of performing group [The Hill Brothers](#) says "we love performing for different audiences, i.e. younger grades and older grades, the performers can adjust each show to be age appropriate."

But that's just one side of the coin . . .

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Catskill Puppet Theater

John Potocnik from [Catskill Puppet Theater](#) feels completely differently for their shows.

He says, “when you mix the ages, the older kids teach the younger ones theater manners by showing them when to stop laughing at a joke or when to applaud at an appropriate place. In turn the young ones teach the older ones how to freely suspend disbelief and to let their imaginations have free reign to enjoy the show. I dare say they are both valuable lessons but I think the young ones are the more valuable ones.”

Bottom line – if you have the flexibility to mix grade levels based on what will work best for

7. Don't seat the preK's right in the front. Please.

I love having the PreK students attend some of the K-2 or even K-5 programs that I do.

They love the music, they really benefit from the experience of being an audience member, and

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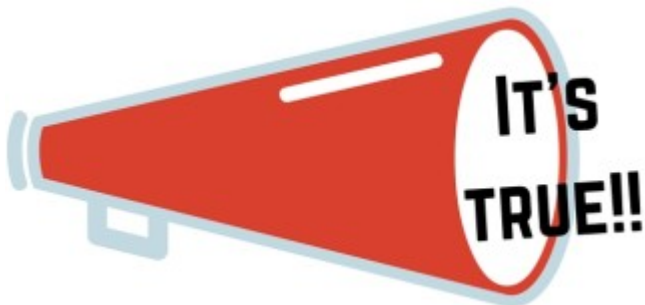
And I know, it's tempting to seat them right up front because, well, they're short, and they can't see anything if they're stuck behind a second grader.

But if you're doing a show for the elementary grades, the preK's will enjoy it just as much if (and they should be included) will be happier.

Again, Judd Sunshine: "That way the Pre-K's can get up (as they often do), and this will also do (which they also often do)."

8. Assigned seats are a problem, sometimes

"The spoken message is more effective the closer the members of an audience



So said researchers Gordon L. Thomas and J. R. Thomas in the introduction to their 1959 report "*A study of the effect of audience proximity on persuasion.*"

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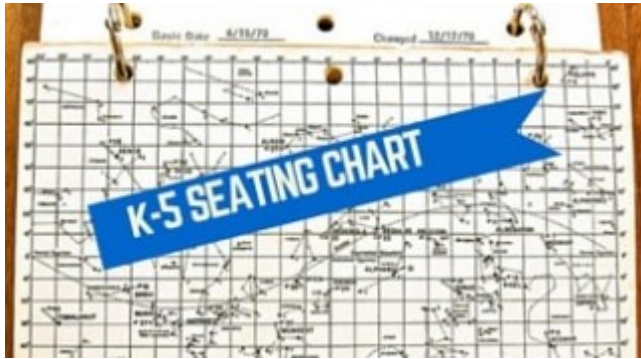
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Thomas and Ralph were quoting one of the commonly-held notions from the fields of public speaking, persuasion, and psychology of speech, and although their tests found “there is not sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis,” I’m here to say that it’s true.

Every last bit of it.

So here’s the situation:



Your school has a specific seating plan for individual classes or grade levels, and this is super efficient for getting students into and out of the performance space with minimal confusion.

But if not all grade levels will be attending the performance, this can be a real energy killer, with a lot of students.

PRO TIP

If possible, it makes great sense in this circumstance to abandon the seating plan for a more dynamic possible experience.

Just like you probably wouldn’t favor teaching a class to students who were seated sparsely with performers to give you their most dynamic program if students are spread out over too much ground.

AND, there are far better seats/vantage points available that nobody is using!

9. The STOP time is as important as the start time

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Sometimes, it takes longer than planned to get everyone into the performance space, seated and expected, the performers may have to cut their show short.

It's best to let them know **ahead of time** if there is a time constraint on the ending of the program accordingly.

10. Introducing your own performance is . . . awkward

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Sometimes it's the little things.

Going back to #5, you are not a performing arts presenter by profession, and the importance of a brief introduction to the program may not occur to you.

For many (most?) presentations though, **this makes a big difference.**

Even just a few short sentences from an authority figure who doesn't mind speaking in public wonderful event where performers feel welcomed and connected to the school, students under everyone can settle in from there.

The performers may have a pre-printed little "blurb" you can follow, or I've seen plenty of pri the performers or the topic!

(Not recommended, but it can work in a pinch.)

So, nothing to stress over, but this is the preferred way to start an event for most performers w

11. It's not over when it's over

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A selfie: Nancy Sterman-Fernandez of Young Audiences

Nancy Sterman-Fernandez, Director of Education at [Young Audiences of Western NY](#), has a **great tip** for extending the value of any assembly program.

“Be sure to take some of the tools the artist uses during the performance to use in your own class.

“Maybe even sing the songs you learned or do the dance steps to connect this shared experience.

Indeed, most artists that come through your doors would be delighted to offer you advice and tips.

Just ask.

12. Performers (and kids!) love it when teachers show up

Of course, that’s “show up” as in *being here and being present*, as opposed to *I’m here but I need to get to the assembly because I have too much to do*.

Believe me, we completely understand that sometimes there’s just more work to be done than time for the teaching staff.

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But, if at all possible, it would be great if you could encourage the teachers to take in the asser



Regi Carpenter

Veteran storyteller, author and performer [Regi Carpenter](#) suggests using the program “as a time a fun time for the school community to be together in joy and wonder.”

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Teachers participating right along with students sends several strong signals to the kids (and performers), and believe me, it **always** makes for a better show.

#13. The web is your friend

Sometimes, you're really starting from scratch.

In that case, a quick little internet search will turn up more resources that might be of help to you.

In a five minute session, I found [a really useful article from PTO Today](#) on choosing and booking a performance.

Putting on your own assembly? You might want to check [this one](#) out, and the brand new eBook below.

Need to convince administration of the role the arts play in learning? Here's [a great resource](#) from Arts Education Partnership.

*I hope you'll let me know what else **you** turn up....*

BONUS!

Wondering How To Make School Assemblies Interesting?

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If you'll be giving a school assembly yourself, I've just packed

- **Command** the attention of the room
- Keep your audience *engaged*
- Reach every student
- Tips and best practices from a life on the stage

I'm happy to share those with you!

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About The Author

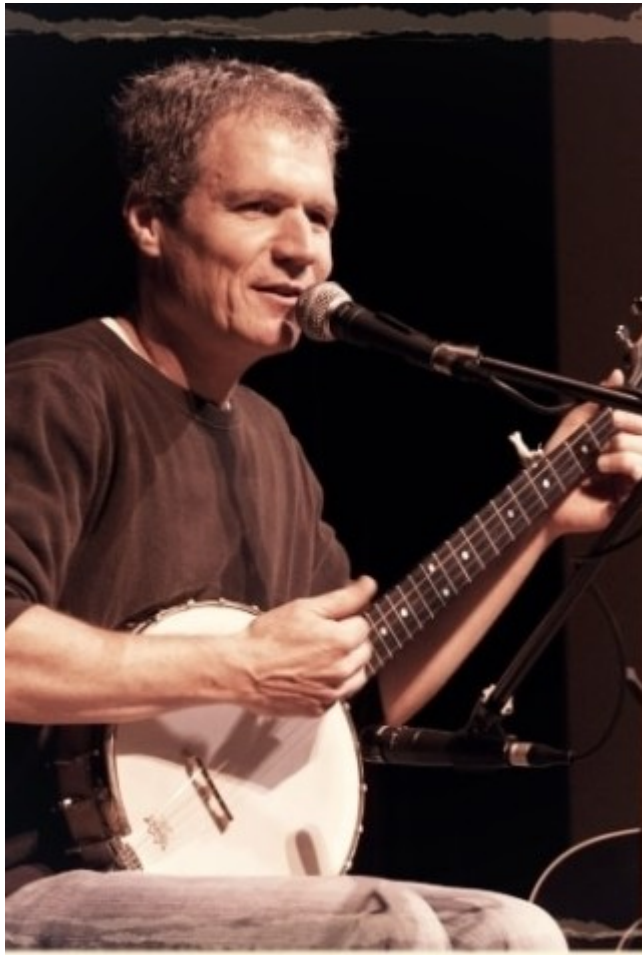
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[Dave Ruch](#)

is a Buffalo NY-based performer
York Council for the Humanities.

Dave has been extensively involved in the arts-in-education field since 1995, using music to teach
[school assemblies](#), [workshops](#), [residencies](#), and [distance learning programs](#).

Join Dave's email list (below) for free articles and resources delivered right to your inbox.

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12 Responses to School Assemblies: 13 Things Every Planner Should Know

1. *Naryan Padmanabha*
[May 11, 2017 at 12:49 pm](#)

Sign me up!

[Reply](#)

2. *Kerry H*
[October 3, 2016 at 9:59 am](#)

Hey Dave!

For a school assembly, who should be drafting the contract? Beyond the rate for the performer, what about covering food and lodging?

[Reply](#)

- o *Dave Ruch*
[October 3, 2016 at 10:09 am](#)

Kerry – in my experience here in the northeastern US, it's the performer who typically negotiates food and lodging – some will ask for that, others will build it into the fee that helps. Where are you located?

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[Reply](#)

3. *Tanya pahuja*
[May 16, 2016 at 1:46 pm](#)

Yaa its what a good learning for me..thnkew for it..??

[Reply](#)

- *Tanya pahuja*
[May 16, 2016 at 1:47 pm](#)

It was..**

[Reply](#)

- *Dave Ruch*
[May 16, 2016 at 2:03 pm](#)

Glad to hear it Tanya!

[Reply](#)

4. *Deb Mortensen*
[October 15, 2015 at 12:23 pm](#)

I led an assembly on Tuesday and these pointers are right on! We were talking about the acted out scenerios (some responsible and others not so much!) We had over 1000 people down. This time it was me saying "Get set" and they replying "you be"! We have a key classrooms if they want. It is much better than saying "shhhhhh!" Thanks for sharing your concert on November 3. This involves almost 200 students.

[Reply](#)

- *Dave Ruch*
[October 15, 2015 at 1:18 pm](#)

Great to hear Deb, thanks for sharing. I'm going to email you a song about respect when I was a Hill Brother (<http://www.hillbrothers.net>). We wrote a whole show about and responsibility. Lots of fun to be had with those topics, as I'm sure your students

[Reply](#)

5. *Debby Williams*
[October 14, 2015 at 8:55 am](#)

We are really looking forward to the concert, because last year's performance was so en

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- *Dave Ruch*
[October 15, 2015 at 1:14 pm](#)

Glad to hear it Debby!

[Reply](#)

- *SUREKA*
[July 30, 2018 at 9:27 pm](#)

glad to hear reply from you all

[Reply](#)

- *SUREKA*
[July 30, 2018 at 9:31 pm](#)

can you say me articles if any?

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- [The \\$149 School Assembly](#)
- [Three Ways to Bring the World Into Your Classroom](#)
- [Black History Month Activities: Play Some Hambone!](#)

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Quick Contact

Have questions or looking for booking information? Call Dave at 716-884-6855, or send him a message below.

*Required

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